Please return to Allison Johnson Hemingford Nebraska 69348

Got 37

Excellent in material and tone.

Adv. Comp.

A Civil War Veteran

North Carolina was the last State to seceded from the Union, but when she withdrew my grandfather, Benjamin Perry Johnson was one of the first from that state to enlist in the services of the South. Other men and youths from the vicinity of Wilkesburrough immediately followed his example, and (They) formed a fighting squadron under the Captaincy of H. Marlin. Benjamin was made a First Lieutenant. This band of men became Company G of the 54th N. Carolina regiment.

Lieutenant Johnson and his company were immediately detailed to Richmond, and with pratically no military experience they entered battle. Warfare for the next few months was centered around Richmond and Fredericksburg. In those early days Southern hopes were still high. Their armies were sadly depleted, and the country was breaking under the heavy burden of extreme poverty, but there was no thought of surrender.

On Dec 20, 1862, after a terrific battle at Fredericksburg, Lieutenant Johnson wrote to his wife and children, a letterof mixed happiness and sorrow, from which I quote: "Through the mercies of a kind providence, I am once more permitted to drop you a few lines which will inform you that I am as well as could be considerering the many hardships and fatigues that I have had to endure for the past few months. But it is with melancholy feeling that I state to you that William is very sick with either typhoid or pneumonia. I got him started to the hospital for it is impossible to take care of a sick man in this camp. He went into the battle apparently undaunted and fought bravely. I didn't discover until the second day after the fight that he was ill, and I immediately got permission of the Colonel to send him

to Richmond. I asked the Chaplain to write to me or to you. Nearly every man in this company is ill, and they say there is Small Pox in the army now.

"All is quiet here, and it is thought the Yankees are leaving and going down the river. Our loss in this battle is estimated at two or three thousand killed and wounded, while the Yankee loss is from eight to ten thousand. It is regarded as a complete victory on our side, and a signal defeat on the enemies. I saw a good many Yankee prisoners and talked to them. They seemed to be as tired of the war as we are, and to think that it would be impossible for them to whip us, and they seem to think this fight will never end. They are a good looking set of men and well clothed. I also saw a company of them that came over to bury their dead, and while they were over here they passed jokes as friendly as if all were well. I thought it funny to see men meet and talk on friendly terms, who in an hour might be shooting at one another.

" It has now been over three months since I have seen any of you, and I would be glad to see you all once more, if it were so I could. We are not going into winter quarters, and under the circumstances, there is no chance to come. Write Soon and often. I will close by saying that if I never see you again in this life, I hope to meet you when troubles will be over, and we shall part no more -- Farewell. Benjamin P. Johnson."

The "William" that Lieut. Johnson spoke of was his brother, his youngest brother, who died four days after the letter was written, from typhoid.

But the war didn't end then. It only grew worse. Men were shot down by the thousands, and women and children were dying of privation and worry. Southern soldiers were dying in the camps from hunger and fatigue. Resources were almost exhausted and boys of fourteen were being called to arms. Yankees, the Damyankees, as the Southerners called them, were forcing Southern families to feed them.

Lieut. Johnson received a letter from his wife stating

that a detachment of Stoneham's army had taken up headquarters in her home and had slaughtered all the pigs, chickens, and cattle for feed. All they left was one blind mule which they said was too tough to eat. This one old mule was all they had left to aid them in the onerous task of farming the rocky, almost barren slopes of their land. Had it not been for wild berries Lieut. Johnson's wife and five little children would have starved while he was in the army.

You can get some idea of prices by the following excerpt from a letter written by Johnson to his father, May 23, 1863: "A meal's victuals cost $2, and a bed for the night $2. I was getting very low on clothes, and today I bought a common hat for $15, a very common shirt for $6, some low grade pants for $10, and a pair of shoes for $25. Brandy is $4 a drink. I received the box which you all sent me, for which I am very thankful. I have been living very well since I got it. I took 2 or 3 drinks out of the half gallon of brandy you sent me, and then sold the remainder for $70."

The war dragged on; the North always refreshed by new and sturdy troops, the South hanging on grimly and desperately, with the spirit of indominable courage which has gone down in History. Company G fought in thirty different battles and Lieut. Johnson wrote home that it was one of God's Miracles that he wasn't wounded because the bullets were flying so fast he doubted if a snow bird could have lived.

The South was on the defensive and waiting for the Yankees' next move. All they could do was wait. They weren't strong enough to attack. Neither could they wait much longer. Lieut. Johnson, in the last letter he wrote to his mother and father before the close of the war, expresses better than I can the position of the Southern forces. The letter is dated Mar. 5, 1865.

"All is quiet so far as I know along our lines around Petersburg, and Richmond, but how long it will remain so, time alone can tell. We are expecting a fight here almost daily, especially since the rain has

ceased. If it should remain fair and windy long enough for the ground to become settled I shall expect active opeerations immediately to follow. You probably have more news than I do from the fact that the Richmond papers have ceased to publish the movements of our enemy at other places. For the present I can't find out Gen'l Sherman's exact whereabouts but from the best I can learn he is somewhere between Columbia of S. Carolina and Layetteville N. Carolina, aiming to form a junction with Gen'l Scofield who is said to be advancing from Willmington N. C. It is supposed that they contemplate a junction about Fayetteville, Raleigh or Galesboro N. Carolina. Whicher they will be successful in carrying them out remains to be seen. It is reasonable to suppose that they will have something to do yet before they meet, or at least our army in that quarter will certainly give them the best they have before they form a junction.

"I have not received a cent from the government for eleven months, and I have no idea when I shall get any of it that is due me.

"You all would probably like to know something about the spirits of our army. Let it suffice to say that it is not good, but if we could have a complete victory or two in the opening of the campaign, it would probably revive them again.

I have nothing more of any importance to write. I have not heard from you for two weeks. I heard the mail route was torn up and I fear the time may come when we can't hear from home at all, but I want you all to write regularly as long as there is a chance that I may get it. It is not worth while for me to say that I want to see you all, for you all no doubt know that before I say it. But I fear that it will be a long time before I see you again, if ever. I now close before saying I remain yours as long as life endures. Farewell."

A few months later at Appomattox, the closing battle of the war, Lieut. Johnson and his troop became lost in the fog, and lost the rest of the army. In the confusion of the utter darkness of a blanketing fog, theystumbled into the Yankee lines and were ordered to surrender.

There was nothing else to do.

The Lieutenant and about fifty other officers were taken to Washington and imprisoned in the old Capital building. Here they were detained for weeks, and it was some time before the surly guards even told them that Lee had surrendered the morning following their capture.

Johnson was a prisoner in Washington the night that Lincoln was assassinated. A furious mob, thinking a Southerner was responsible, stormed the jail. Washington had to call out some of its newly returned militia to rout the mob.

The Lieut. and the other officers were then taken to Johnson's Island, out in Lake Erie, and were kept there for three months after the close of the war. They were neither fed nor clothed. Their garments hung in tatters, and they paid negro boys a quarter apiece for wharf rats for food. Rats were their main diet.

Late in the year, Lieutenant Johnson was sent home, a ruined man, broken in health and spirit. He found his farm gone to seed, and run down. There was no grain to plant nor money to buy more. There was absolutely no money in the country. Taxes were $4 a year and he paid those by serving on the jury.

Too ill to do heavy labor, Lieutenant Johnson started a cabinet and furniture shop. He supplied furniture and coffins to everybody in the country. All the furniture was made by hand, and there is plenty of it in N. Carolina today, still wearing his label.

The war had broken up the schools, and, since his children had no chance for an education in N. Carolina, Johnson, with his family came to Western Nebraska, and settled on a Homestead near old Box Butte, about seventeen miles east of Hemingford, Nebraska. There he partially regained his health, and lived happy, and content with his growing family. He saw his eldest daughters teaching school and his young sons staking out homesteads of their own.

He died January 22, 1892, and was buried in the Heming-

ford Cemetery. Every Decoration Day he is honored by a double salute; once for his bravery in the war, and, once for being one of the first ~~steelers~~ settlers in Box Butte County.* Custom no longer followed.

## 30

Address in war:

Lieutenant Benj. P. Johnson
Company G, 54 N. C. Regiment
Early's Division
Hood's Brigade
Richmond, Virginia.

His Superior officers:
Generals -- Ewell, Barley
Captains -- A. H. Martin
Colonels -- Windbish, McDowell, Murkinson
In Lee's Army.

Volunteered at age 37; died at 67.

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This was written by my sister (Villetta). She died July 20, 1977 at Custer, So. Dak. and was buried at Custer, So. Dak.